An Essay on

Medical Ethics

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Among the varied and interesting duties, devolving upon the Physician, both in public, and private life, there is perhaps, none, that are of more importance in their bearing upon his professional reputation, or the, welfare of that portion of community entrusted to his care, than the deportment which he, is to observe in his intercourse, with the public, with his patrons, and with the — profession of which he is a member. Hence the importance, of his entering upon his mission with his mind fully prepared, and enriched, by well digested maxims, that will enable him in the commencement of his career, to adopt such rules of action, as will be most conducive, to the attainment of a high professional reputation. It is not our intention to go into a full and elaborate analysis of the rules of etiquette, by which he is to be governed in every situation

in which he may be placed, but to enumerate a few of the more obvious requirements, an observance of which will enable him, if in possession of an enlightened mind, coupled with affability, kindness, and good judgement, to sustain both his professional and private relations, in a manner, alike creditable to himself, and beneficial to society. Among the first and most obvious duties of a Physician to his patrons, is that he be ever ready to attend their call; whether it be by night, or by day, in the winters cold, or summers heat, in the raging storm, or the Springs bright sunshine, whether he be ~~at the~~ festive board, or in the society of friends, in the house of prayer, or on his bed of rest, he should at once respond, with promptness and alacrity. He should not only be in readiness, but his mind should be fully imbued with the greatness of his mission and the responsibility devolving upon him in its discharge,

ever keeping in mind the fact, that his own conscience is the only tribunal at which he can answer for neglect or inattention. Hence in his ministrations to the sick, he should study so to unite tenderness with firmness, — and condescension with authority, as to inspire his patient with gratitude, respect, and confidence. Every case committed to his care, should be treated with attention and steadiness, and every indulgence compatible with its successful treatment, should be promptly and cheerfully accorded. The medical practitioner must be a man of virtue, and honor, "as he is necessarily the confident and confessor of his patient, the repository of griefs, follies, wickedness, and shame of bodily and mental infirmities. All that pride, fear, and modesty, hides from the world, is revealed to him, and revealed, under a moral pledge of secrecy, as strong and binding, as the religious one, which guards the sanctity of the confessional."

He cannot betray the confidence of the sick, or divulge the secrets of families, without dishonor to himself, and the basest treachery to his patients. Frequent visits should be made to the sick, that he may be able to watch close ly the different phases of the disease, and take advanta ge of any changes that may occur, by which its progress may be checked, or its course modified. But, while the physician should not allow the intervals between his visits to be too long; he should as carefully guard against the other extreme, of visiting too often, as such a course will not only lessen his authority over, and give the patient unnecessary anxiety, but may give rise to the suspicion that he is actuated by interested motives. He should not indulge in gloomy prognostications, as to the termination of a disease, neither should he hesitate, on proper occasions, to inform the friends, and if necessary, the patient, himself, of any danger that is likely to occur.

He should also remember that he is the minister of hope and comfort, and study to avoid every thing, which may have a tendency to discourage, or depress the spirits of his patient. A Physician should not, from a false delicacy, abandon a case, that has become hopeless, but by his attention, and sympathy, soothe the mental anguish, and allay as far as possible the bodily pains of the sufferer in the last stages of a fatal malady. And lastly, he should not neglect the opportunities, he may have of aiding, or encouraging, the good resolutions, of those, who have been addicted to vicious conduct, and irregular habits of life, and though, he may even be obliged to remonstrate, if it be done with politeness, and sincerity, it will be well received and gratefully remembered.

As every individual, upon entering the medical profession, becomes entitled to all its privileges and immunities, he in like manner incurs an obligation to use his abilities, to maintain its dignity, and honor, exalt its standing, and extend the sphere of its usefulness. To do this successfully, he must mark out for himself, a high standard of moral excellence, the attainment of which, is a duty, every physician owes, alike, to the profession to the public, and to his patients. He should be temperate in all things. As regards the use of intoxicating drinks, in particular, he should, "touch not, taste not, handle not". He should be not only temperate, but a temperance man.

Even bearing in mind, that in no profession, is the exercise of a clear and vigorous mind, more constantly required, than in that of Medicine; and in emergencies, a steady hand, an acute eye, and an unclouded brain, may be essential to the well being and perhaps the life of a fellow creature. The educated, and intelligent physician, will never resort to public advertisements, or private cards, inviting the attention of the public, to his success in the treatment of particular diseases, neither will he allow the puff indirect, in public newspapers, of an important operation performed, or the life of a valuable citizen saved, by his great skill. And much less will he condescend to associate himself with, or in any way

countenance the vending of patent, or secret nostrums for the cure of disease. If, he is so fortunate, as to discover a remedy, possessing healing qualities, which entitles it to the notice of the profession, let it be at once made known, that all may share in the benefits, to be derived from its use, or on the other hand become acquainted with its unreliability, and by timely notice, protect the pockets and perhaps the lives of their fellow men. If physicians, instead of disgracing themselves, and the profession, as is too often done, by giving certificates of the great value of patent medicines, would exert their united influence against it, and faithfully warn the public of its uncertainty and

worthlessness, the oceans of bad brandy and worse molasses, which now flood the land, under the names of balsams, and expectorants, alteratives and panaceas, might in time be dried up, and a benefit thereby conferred upon humanity, lasting in its effects, and deserving the gratitude of all future generations.

Then, can the professional man, instead of blushing with shame for the charlatanry, which has pervaded the ranks of medicine, proudly raise his head, and rejoice, that the altar upon which he has laid his offering, is no longer desecrated by the unholy touch of the mercenary quack.

Towards his professional brethren, the physician should always

maintain a courteous, and gentlemanly demeanor, cheerfully rendering them any service, which friendly relations would dictate or professional etiquette demand. If called upon to consult, he should observe the most scrupulous regard, for the character and standing of the attending physician, and if necessary justify his practice, as far as consistent with truth. And in no case should a hint, or insinuation, be thrown out, calculated to impair the confidence reposed in him, or in any way injure his reputation. As regards the extent, to which professional intercourse, can be carried, between practitioners of different schools of medicine, it may be well to say a few words, although the answer

is so obviously plain, that it can scarcely appear doubtful to the least reflective mind. It is supposed that all physicians are gentlemen, and adopting this as a rule, it follows that as such, they will always observe a gentlemanly deportment towards each other. But as gentlemen, cannot under any circumstances, make a compromise of principle, it therefore follows that the practitioners of opposite schools, cannot consult together, except in those cases which require a purely mechanical treatment.

Thus far we think, professional intercourse, may be maintained with all due regard for self respect, and professional honor. While the preceding motives would be amply sufficient to present

consultations with physicians of an entirely different school and practice, professional dignity, should in all cases, forbid an association with, or encouragement in any form, of the so called Doctors, which spring up on every hand, with a mushroom growth, possessing generally, as their principal qualifications, ignorance, and audacity, and deserving, alike the contempt of the profession and the public. As a good citizen, the physician, should be ever vigilant for the welfare and interest of the community, cheerfully bearing his portion, in sustaining its institutions, and its burdens, and be ever ready to counsel the public, in relation to matters pertaining to his profession, particularly, in regard to measures, for

the prevention of epidemic and contagious diseases, giving advice and instruction, in regard to the hygienic rules to be observed, and all other sanatory means calculated to promote general health in the community, and prevent as far as possible the invasion of disease. And when pestilence prevails, he should cheerfully and boldly face the danger, and faithfully labor for the allevi ation of those suffering from its ravages. As a member of a learned and lib eral profession, it is expected that the physician be generally intelligent. It has been well said, "that men of one study, become men of one idea, to be recognised by a characteristic narrowness of mind."

The enlarged intellect, and liberal spirit of the Scholar, is only to be acquired by a more diffusal course of reading.— And while it should not be so multifarious, and ill assorted, as to make the— mind chaotic, it should be sufficiently general, to make him conversant— not only with the advancement of the sciences, and of the arts, but with all other matters pertaining to the interest and welfare of the community, at large. Thus, let him go forth, upon his mission, fully impressed with its sacredness, and importance, and labor faithfully in the discharge of its duties; "along his pathway let virtue train her fairest flowers, in his life let religion gather her choicest fruits", and in the

end, all the deep content, that filled the breast of a Howard, in his labor of love, may be fully experienced, by even the most humble practitioner of medicine.